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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire administered to 1979 incoming freshmen at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was used to assess the effects of educational maturity on college choice. Educational maturity is defined by the student's certainty about college major and career choice. Results show that strength of the major department is the most frequent reason for selecting the institution for educationally mature freshmen, both black and white. Those defined as educationally immature selected the university on the basis of academic reputation. It is concluded that the university might do well to build on the apparently accepted idea among educationally mature young blacks that even if a large, traditionally white institution lacks the nurturing environment expected at the traditionally black institution, it can provide elements of future success. However, it is also noted that even the educationally mature black student arrives at the university with a strong desire for special help in such areas as study and reading skills, and the institution must emphasize these areas. Frequency charts for questionnaire items and categories are appended, as are some selected general comments from the response forms. (MSE)

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Educational Maturity, Race, and the Selection of a College

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Educational Maturity, Race, and the Selection of a College

Does a large, selective, public university offer a particularly attractive environment for students with well-formulated career and major objectives or does its wide range of majors and course offerings serve as an enrollment inducement to students who are very unsure of their future plans? Adding race as another variable, is such an institution's appeal to minority students primarily limited to those who have clearly defined career and educational goals? Stated another way, is the university viewed as a positive challenge by minority students who are certain of their future plans (educationally mature) while being seen as too rigorous and unwelcoming by other minority students more in need of opportunities to grow and be nurtured during their college years (educationally immature)?

The answer to these questions may be important to the University's recruiting efforts generally and could influence attempts to increase minority presence in Chapel Hill. Also, there is some evidence linking educational maturity (certainty of goals) with persistence in college (Kowalski, 1977).

Methods

A questionnaire administered to incoming freshmen in fall 1979 provided the opportunity to explore the effects of educational maturity on the selection of The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH). The survey had been modified from an instrument designed by North Carolina State University using the core questions required by UNC General Administration. Originally intended to be part of a large effort to survey not only freshmen who came to the university but also those who declined admission to enroll elsewhere, the survey was administered to 3454 entering freshmen in August 1979; 3,277 (94.9%) responded. Unfortunately, time and resources did not permit the extension of the survey to admitted freshmen applicants who enrolled elsewhere.

The survey, as used, consisted of 19 separate items asking the respondent to select, from a list of 22, the five most important reasons for coming to UNC-CH and to indicate if UNC were his/her first, second, or third choice of school. In addition, information on family background, high school location and racial composition, need for help in study and reading skills, and other similar data were gathered. The survey data were matched then with the student master file to obtain sex, race, predicted grade-point average (PGA), and residency status.

The answers to two of the survey questions were combined to define "Educational Maturity". The questions and possible responses were:

At this time, have you decided on your major field of study?

1. Yes, feel very certain about my choice of major.
2. Yes, but am unsure about my choice.
3. No, have no idea what to major in.

Do you have a particular career plan or occupational goal in mind at this time?

1. Yes.
2. No.

Those freshmen responding "Yes I am sure . . . " to the first question and "Yes" to the second were classified as educationally mature while those responding "No" to both questions were viewed as educationally immature.

A possible drawback in this definition of educational maturity is the job or career orientation of the questions used; the concept might be described better as a measure of vocationalism rather than of maturity. Focusing the definition toward the career-centered student poses the danger of failing to identify the mature, but not vocationally oriented, student. This student is typified, perhaps, by the liberal arts major who sees the college years, or at least the early years, as a time for self-examination, discovery, and growth and as an opportunity to explore the cultural variety offered by a major university, giving little thought at the moment to a career. On the other hand, the use of educational maturity with its bias towards vocationalism may be a clear reflection of the occupational orientation of today's college freshmen (Margarrell, 1980).

The Respondent Group

The typical respondent in this study was white (86.3%), female (57.8%), N.C. resident (88.0%), went to high school in a moderate size city (27.3%), attended a public high school (85.9%), described as racially mixed (49.8%) or mostly white (42.3%), father is a college graduate (28.1%), mother is a college graduate (29.0%), aspires to a batchelor's degree (34.3%), has chosen a major but is unsure of the choice (55.1%), has a particular career plan or occupational goal in mind (68.3%), has a PGA = 2-2.5 (44.7%), and selected Carolina as first choice (86.2%). Fitting our operational definition of educationally mature were 975 freshmen or 29.8% of the respondents; classified as educationally immature were 329 or 10% of the respondent group.

Results and Discussions

In examining the data without regard to race, one sees that of those making UNC-CH their first choice 30.4% were classed as mature while 9.4% were immature (Table 3). Mature students tended to express a greater need for help with study and reading skills, perhaps in itself an indication of maturity in the sense of recognition of one's strengths and weaknesses. The planned educational level of over 67% of the mature students was beyond a batchelor's degree while only 53% of the immature had plans for graduate education. More than 25% of the mature freshmen planned to attend professional school as opposed to only 21.8% of the entire freshman class giving futher evidence of focused career goals.

The respondents were asked to select and rank five reasons (of 22) for choosing Carolina (Table 1). The results for the class as a whole showed academic reputation most frequently selected as the first reason and also as the most frequently given second reason. Strength of major was most often ranked as the third reason for selecting UNC-CH; however, when the educationally mature were extracted from the total class, they ranked strength of major as first choice (48.1%) with academic reputation second. The immature listed academic reputation as first and second

reasons. In comparing the two groups down the scale (1st to 5th reason) a convergence of reason emerges, perhaps indicating that these are greater similarities than differences among freshmen. Reason three shows general agreement on the importance of "friendly student body", "social activities", and "I like the area", indicating that despite career concerns the university is still viewed as a community of young people interacting on many levels and with important interests in addition to vocational preparation.

While black freshmen as a group were less likely to make UNC-CH their first choice than were their white counterparts, mature blacks chose Carolina first more often than did immature blacks. A similar but somewhat stronger pattern occurred across maturity for whites. The hypothesis is that maturity exerts a greater influence than race on students in selecting a university such as UNC-CH. In order to further test this assumption, partial correlations were run on the data. The results showed a strengthening of the correlation between educational maturity and first choice when race was controlled (from 0.0862, $p < .001$ to 0.0975, $p < .001$). When other variables such as sex, residency, and PGA were controlled singly and in combination, it was only when race was included in the controlled combination that there was a noticeable strengthening of the association.

Many authors have commented on the high education aspirations of black students at white colleges (Jones, 1979; Wilson, 1978; Reichard and Uhl, 1979), but when the dimension of educational maturity is added, the contrast between blacks and whites is further accentuated. Aspiration beyond the batchelor's degree is found in 78.1% of mature blacks as compared to 65.8% of mature whites. The combination of educational maturity and being a black student at a predominantly white university seems to predict a high level of educational aspiration.

Often pointed out in the literature concerning black and white institutions of higher learning is the need on the part of black students, for assistance in study and reading skills to help offset the poorer academic preparation of the

black high school graduate (Reichard and Uhl, 1979); one of the primary roles of the traditionally black institution (TBI) has been to provide such support. From the survey results it appears that the black student entering a traditionally white institution (TWI) agrees that assistance of this sort is needed. In response to the question of what type of help was desired, 69.1% of the black freshmen responded affirmatively to the need for study skills and 58.4% to the need for reading skills. This compares to only 29.4% and 19.8% for these same areas on the part of whites.

SUMMARY

We have seen that strength of major is the most important reason for selecting UNC-CH on the part of educationally mature freshman of both races. Those defined as educationally immature selected academic reputation as the most important reason.

Several studies have found academic reputation to be the most commonly expressed reason for selecting a university (Astin, 1980; Pratt, Smith, Reichard, Uhl, 1977; Jones, 1979), a conclusion that is supported by the data for the entire freshman class at UNC-CH. However, when those students who fit the definition of being educationally mature are examined, academic reputation falls to second place behind strength of major indicating that those students with definite career or occupational goals were not content to feel secure in the general reputation of the institution. The institution must also meet the test of offering a strong program relating to that career choice. On the other hand, the student lacking a career plan or sure selection of major may be justified in "hedging his bet" by attending a school of solid reputation in order to have a certain degree of perceived quality for his degree whatever the field.

What then are the implications of this study for UNC-CH? In attempting to structure its recruiting efforts, the school might do well to build on the apparently accepted idea among educationally mature blacks that even if a large,

traditionally white institution lacks the nurturing environment expected at the TBI, it can provide what is needed to succeed in the future. As one black student commented, "I feel that if I can successfully complete Carolina (I'm shooting for top ten) then I can successfully compete in the professional world." Educationally mature, career-oriented black students may be willing to forego the nurturing environment of the traditionally black institution and be willing to subject themselves to the assumedly inhospitable atmosphere of the traditionally white institution in exchange for the advantages expected to accrue to their future careers. In similar fashion, Jones (1979) concluded that black students choose, enroll, and remain at predominantly white institutions because they are convinced that the educational benefits derived from the experience are worth any extra effort, struggle, or consideration necessary.

UNC must recognize, however, that even the educationally mature black student arrvies in Chapel Hill with a strong desire for special help in such areas as study and reading skills. The prospective minority student must be made aware of the University's ability to provide this assistance and of its commitment to ensure that the extra effort and struggle are demanded more in the academic rather than the social side of student experiences.

Table 1

MOST IMPORTANT REASONS FOR CHOOSING CAROLINA

Rank as First Reason	Weighted * Rank	Reason	Frequency as First Reason
1	1	Carolina has an excellent academic reputation.	(1301)
2	2	My major program was stronger here.	(879)
3	3	I wanted to be challenged.	(149)
4	16	I was offered a scholarship.	(104)
5	15	Other, specify_____.	(102)
6	6	I wanted to be close to home.	(100)
7	4	I liked the geographic area.	(96)
8	11	The costs were low at UNC-CH.	(86)
9	12	I had relatives who attended here.	(67)
10	7	The University offered many cultural opportunities.	(65)
11	9	Carolina graduates seem to get better jobs.	(62)
12	14	My parents wanted me to attend here.	(57)
13	5	I felt the students were friendly and I would make many friends here.	(52)
14	10	I had many friends planning to attend here.	(40)
15	13	The size of the University was ideal.	(27)
16	18	I was offered the best financial aid package here.	(25)
17	19	I was able to obtain on-campus housing.	(20)
18	8	Many social activities were offered here.	(11)
19	20	I felt I would have a better academic average here.	(9)
20	17	The faculty seemed friendly and helpful to me.	(8)
21	21	I wanted to attend a school in which the majority of students were white.	(7)
22	22	I wanted to study Black history, literature, and culture.	(0)

*To arrive at the weighted rank each reason listed as a first choice was weighted 5, each record choice weighted 4. Through each fifth choice which was given a weight of one.

Table 2

Educational Maturity by Race

	White		Black		Other	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Mature	808	28.6	147	57.5	20	37.3
Immature	294	10.4	27	6.9	8	13.3
Mixed	1723	61.0	218	55.6	32	53.3
	2825	100.0	392	100.0	60	99.9 *

Table 3

Educational Maturity by UNC as Choice

	1st Choice		2nd Choice		3rd Choice	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Mature	855	30.4	102	27.1	15	18.8
Immature	264	9.4	48	12.7	16	20.0
Mixed	1690	60.2	227	60.2	49	61.3
	2809	100.0	377	100.0	80	100.1*

* Percentages do not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table 6

Educational Maturity and Need for Reading Skills by Race

	White		Black	
	yes	no	yes	no
Mature	20.3	79.7	56.5	43.5
Immature	21.8	78.2	44.4	55.6
Mixed	19.2	80.8	61.5	38.5

Table 7

Planned Education Level by Educational Maturity

	Some College	Batchelors	Masters	Professional	Doctorate	
Mature	0.0	32.3	27.5	25.6	14.5	100*
Immature	1.0	46.6	33.6	11.1	7.8	100*
Mixed	.6	33.2	33.5	21.6	11.1	100

* Percentages do not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table 8

Most Important Reason by Educational Maturity

	1st		2nd		3rd		4th		5th	
	M	I	M	I	M	I	M	I	M	I
Academic Reputation	28.2	50.0	33.1	15.3	13.5	11.8	6.1	5.7	5.5	5.5
Major	48.1	1.5	14.4	2.4	8.5	1.6	5.0	3.2	1.9	1.9
Challenge	3.4	5.2	8.7	11.0	12.3	10.2	8.9	9.2	7.0	5.5
Like Area	1.3	4.9	3.4	6.7	6.0	9.0	8.9	8.9	8.5	6.5
Students Friendly	.6	3.4	2.7	7.3	5.2	6.8	10.5	11.1	8.5	9.1

SELECTED GENERAL COMMENTS

The comments included here are exactly as written on the survey. No editing has been attempted:

There are not many Blacks, so I'll study more.

I also had trouble receiving information. I felt that if I was white, I wouldn't have as much hassle.

I can't fill this out - my reasons for attending UNC-CH are irrational and impossible to catagorize. You may however inform HEW that UNC-CH's racial mixture had No influence on my decision to attend UNC-CH.

I don't understand why we have to answer so many set questions. Does this help get percentages so that the University can accept more minorities?

I left home at the age of fifteen. I won and scholarship from a Better Chance (ABC) and went to a private school call The Hall School in Pittsfield, Ma. I have been away from home for a long period of time. I wanted to attend a college close to home. and Carolina sound like the college I would enjoy studying and spending my time here at this college.

The sports events at Carolina really captivated me. I loved the atmosphere and excitement generated at a football game or lacrosse match or watching basketball on TV. The spirit at Chapel Hill was a great influence.

Carolina has more Lumbee Indians attending than any of the other large universities.

Carolina has more minority students than my other choices.

I realized UNC was a predominantly white school, But instead of deterring me. I see it as a challenge. To exist in an environment that is the real world. UNC also had a very good academic education. I want a good education from the best school in N.C. The orientation Committee did an excellent job of making us feel Welcome, like we've come to our new "home."

Besides what I have said already, Project Uplift for minority students really made me decide to attend UNC-CH.

I was advised by other people who had been associated with UNC-CH to look at other colleges and universities, possibly out-of-State. I came to Carolina because of its reputation for an outstanding Journalism program and despite the fact that racial relationships are in no way ideal. The closeness and fellowship of the Black students were major factors, although not deciding ones, in my choice of Carolina as a school.

All I can say is that Carolina is probably The best school for The money in N.C. and much more reason isn't necessarry.

When there is a shortage of housing, why has Carolina steped back from improving it's academic standards? A fifty point raise in median S.A.T. would A.eliminate housing problem, B.Solve it's racial problem C. Allow graduates a better chance at graduate school D. Cut down drop outs. E. attract better faculty F. Throw of the last of the stigma against a "southern school." G. spread taleant to "prodominantly black" Institutions. A review of the admisions standards is seriously needed.

Though Carolina is desegregated and not integrated, I feel that I will have an adequate social life though most of my time will be dedicated to studies and organizations.

There is a large number of Carolina graduates in North Carolina. This fact should help me to gain employment after graduation.

I chose to come to Carolina because it's academic qualities are held high among the employment agencies.

but the one thing which made that decision final was Project Uplift. Through Project Uplift I became aware of what Carolina is all about.

I chose Carolina because of its reputation of academic excellence and I didn't want to attend a college that I thought I could easily breeze right through, because their I wouldn't know all my capablities. I wanted a challenge! I hope it's not to great a challenge.

I do object however, to the quotas, ie. black vs. white, that the university has to satisfy in the enrollment. I believe that students should enter on an equal basis and not be given tenient consideration to satisfy federal regulations. If I were here on the merits of my quota filling ability and, not totally on an objective academic consideration, then I would feel that I didn't truly belong.

Carolina has a broad spectrum of academic programs & opportunities for someone who is undecided about what they want to do.

I feel it has a good name & will help me a lot.

The opportunities that are available at this relatively inexpensive university were very inviting.

mainly because it has so much for me as a undecided general college student. There are so many academic opportunities that can help me find the right major for me.

I applied to Carolina because I do not know what areas of study I want to follow or major in. The university of UNC's academics would keep me from being caught in an area I could not possibly major in as could easily happen in a small non-diversified college. With its excellence in most fields I felt assured of a good solid education.

First of all, I was the major deciding factor in applying to Carolina. My parents backed me and one of my H.S. Counselors tried to discourage me, but I was determined to make it. Secondly being a black student but growing up with mostly white people, I wanted to attend a racially mixed school because I felt there are many cultral experiences to be gained. Success is my final reason. I feel that if I can successfully complete Carolina (I'm shooting for Top Ten) Then I can successfully compete in the professional world.

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